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ABSTRACT

Experimental studies indicate that the primary determinant of changes in sexual and aggressive behavior following alcohol consumption is expectancy. Multiple regression analyses were performed on the responses of 100 college students to an alcohol-expectancy questionnaire to determine how expectations for sexual and aggressive behavior following alcohol consumption were related to subject sex, target person sex, and drinking history. Results indicated that all major variables were related to expectations. Increases in sexual desire and aggressive behaviors were expected by all subjects. A decline in sexual performance was expected for men, whereas an enhancement of sexual performance was expected for women who become intoxicated. Consistent with sex role stereotypes, men were expected to behave more aggressively than women. The findings imply that inconsistencies reported in the literature may reflect differences in sample characteristics, such as subject sex or drinking history, and that it is necessary to control for these attributes when discriminating between psychological and physiological effects of alcohol on behavior. (Author)

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An Assessment of Expectancies for Sexual and Aggressive Behaviors of Male and Female Drinkers

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An Assessment of Expectancies for Sexual and Aggressive Behaviors of Male and Female Drinkers

Experimental studies indicate that the primary determinant of changes in sexual and aggressive behavior following alcohol consumption is expectancy (e.g., Kreutzer & Schneider, 1979; Wilson & Lawson, 1976). Such findings raise questions concerning the specific factors which affect these expectancies. The present study focuses on three such factors: (a) sex of the subject--do males and females have different expectancies for drunken comportment? (b) sex of target person--are there different expectancies for male and female drinkers, perhaps in line with existing sex-role stereotypes? (c) subjects' drinking history/frequency--does experience with alcohol affect the nature of beliefs regarding its influence on behavior?

Procedure

Fifty male and fifty female introductory psychology students (randomly assigned to target conditions) were presented with an alcohol-expectancy questionnaire. On a scale of 1-7 (see Figure 1), subjects rated how they expected a moderate dosage of alcohol (i.e., "3-4 beers") to affect ten sexual and aggressive behaviors of either a male or female target. In addition, several drinking history/frequency measures were obtained. These indicated: (1) how frequently the subjects drank on weekends; (2) the degree to which their social affairs involved drinking; (3) the subjects' feelings of guilt, (4) self-confidence, and (5) self-worth following alcohol consumption.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Results

Means were computed for each of the ten expectancy measures, as were group means collapsed across sex of subject and sex of target person. These are presented in Table 1. In general, subjects expected moderate increases in sexual desire, loudness of voice, risk-taking, and the use of profanity following consumption of a moderate dosage of alcohol. Slight increases were expected in willingness to fight, criminal impulse, and hostility, while slight decreases were expected for peacefulness and inhibition.

Sex of subject, sex of target, and the five drinking history measures were entered as predictor variables in stepwise multiple regression analyses. Responses to the ten expectancy items served as criterion variables. R^2 values for each predictor variable and the total proportion of variance (R^2 total) accounted for in each criterion measure were obtained (see Table 2). The latter values ranged from 4-29%. A meaningfulness criterion was set for the regression analyses such that R^2 values are reported herein only for those predictor variables which were both reliable ($p < .05$) and provided a minimum increment of 5% in the amount of variance accounted for in a criterion measure. The R^2 values represent the proportion of criterion variance associated with each predictor after variables accounting for greater proportions of variance have been entered into the regression equation.

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

The greatest proportions of variance in subjects' expectancies for risk-taking, loudness of voice, hostility, and use of profanity were accounted for by the subject sex factor. In each case the sign of the associated beta weights indicated that female subjects expected higher incidence of these behaviors following alcohol consumption than did males.

Sex of the target person was the primary determinant of the variance in subjects' expectancies for criminal impulse, willingness to fight, and sexual performance. This factor also accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in the hostility measure. Both male and female subjects expected men to display greater hostility, criminal impulse, and willingness to fight than women. In contrast, improved sexual performance was anticipated for women and not for men.

Although not primary determinants of the variance in criterion measures, two of the drinking frequency/history items accounted for meaningful proportions of variance. Expectations for hostile behavior following alcohol consumption were greater for subjects who did not report drinking to increase self-confidence than for those who did. Additionally, subjects who reported greater involvement in alcohol-related social situations also anticipated greater increases in the use of profanity.

Discussion

As might be expected on the basis of previous research findings, subjects anticipate increases in both physical and verbal forms of aggression and increases in sexual desire following alcohol consumption. This study attempted to quantify as well as isolate factors that underlie expectations for drunken comportment.

Of the factors included in the present study, sex of rater and sex of target were the most potent in accounting for variability in subjects' expectations. In general, females anticipated greater increases in aggressive behavior following alcohol consumption. Additionally, subjects' expectations were consistent with existing sex-role stereotypes in that men were expected to behave more aggressively than women when intoxicated. It is also interesting to note that while subjects of both sexes expected increases in sexual desire following alcohol consumption, enhancement of sexual performance was expected for women, whereas a decline in performance was expected for men. There does appear to be some degree of relationship between drinking history/frequency and the nature of beliefs regarding the influence of alcohol on behavior. Subjects' reports of drinking to increase self-confidence and frequency of involvement in alcohol-related social situations were significant determinants of subjects' expectations for aggressive behaviors.

There are a number of implications that follow from these findings. First, the inconsistent findings reported in the experimental literature may reflect differences in sample characteristics, such as differences in subject sex and drinking history. For example, researchers using male subjects have found increased aggression following alcohol consumption (e.g., Kreutzer & Schneider, 1979), while those using female subjects and identical measures have found no changes in aggressiveness (e.g., Doleys et al., 1967). Shuntich and Taylor (1972), using a sample of moderate drinkers, found that the physiological effects of alcohol resulted in increased physical aggression, whereas Lang et al. (1975), using a sample

of heavy drinkers, found no physiological effects. Secondly, these results suggest that it is important for alcohol researchers to control for these subject attributes when attempting to discriminate between psychological and physiologial effects of alcohol on behavior. Finally, it should be noted that the majority of the variance in subjects' expectancies was not accounted for by the factors included in the present study. Future research should focus on delineating additional factors related to expectations for drunken comportment in order to clarify their etiology and development.

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Figure 1

Behavior Rating Scale

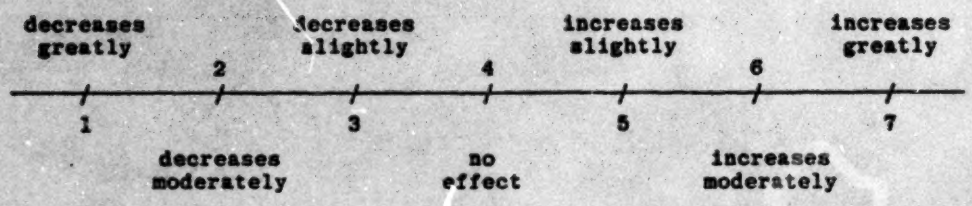

Table 1

Means for Questionnaire Items

		Male Subject		Female Subject		
		male target	female target	male target	female target	
	Item					Total
1.	hostility	4.44	3.92	5.60	4.64	4.64
2.	sexual desire	5.16	5.48	5.88	5.88	5.68
3.	criminal impulse	4.92	4.56	4.84	4.40	4.68
4.	loudness of voice	5.48	5.64	6.04	5.92	5.77
5.	risk taking	5.52	5.48	6.08	5.80	5.72
6.	inhibition	3.36	2.88	3.28	2.76	3.07
7.	willingness to fight	5.56	4.40	5.96	4.80	5.18
8.	sexual performance	3.72	4.17	3.60	4.52	4.00
9.	peacefulness	3.48	3.24	3.44	3.34	3.37
10.	use of profanity	5.44	5.56	6.08	5.92	5.75

TABLE 2

PROPORTION OF VARIANCE ACCOUNTED FOR IN CRITERION MEASURES

CRITERION	PREDICTORS: SUBJECT SEX	TARGET SEX	WEEKEND DRINKING	DRINKING--SOCIAL SITUATIONS	DRINKING--GUILT FEELINGS	DRINKING--FEELS BETTER	DRINKING--SELF-CONFIDENCE	R^2 TOTAL
HOSTILITY	.11**	.07(-)**		.04**	.03**		.05(-)**	.29
CRIMINAL IMPULSE		.05(-)**				.03(-)*		.10
LOUDNESS OF VOICE	.05**			.02**				.10
RISK TAKING	.06**			.04**				.12
USE OF PROFANITY	.08**		.03**	.06*			.02(-)**	.12
WILLINGNESS TO FIGHT	.03*	.22(-)**						.27
PEACEFULNESS								.04
INHIBITION						.04(-)*		.07
SEXUAL DESIRE								.15
SEXUAL PERFORMANCE	.06**							.09

NOTE: ALL BETA WEIGHTS ARE POSITIVE EXCEPT WHERE INDICATED (-).

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$